

MALCOLM McDOWELL



Malcolm McDowell has been described as having the face of a corrupt schoolboy and the force of a young British Brando. In fact, McDowell says, "I like to create a force rather than a character in my films." That force can be enormous, even explosive. It is almost as if it were fated that McDowell should play the demonic Caligula. McDowell portrays the timid yet deceitful 19-year-old who becomes ruler of the Roman Empire after murdering his predecessor and grandfather, Tiberius. Then seeking and gaining favor of his people but unable to cope with the power that goes with the title of Emperor, McDowell depicts Caligula's descent into madness.

"I tried to act Caligula from *his* point of view," he says, "that he is sane, and that it is the people around him who are mad." McDowell is careful to choose scripts that allow him to display his strength as an actor. A year elapsed between the release of the sensationally successful *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and the making of *O Lucky Man!* (1973). Then he sat it out for eighteen months, turning down a plethora of scripts until he accepted the part of Caligula.

"The experience of portraying the extraordinary character of Caligula is pushing whatever talent I have to the farthest limits," he says. "It's an experience as an actor I have never had before."

McDowell was born in Leeds, England, on June 13, 1943. He turned to acting by a fluke. While working as a salesman for a coffee firm, he and a girlfriend signed up for elocution lessons. The speech teacher, recognizing his potential, urged him to enroll at the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in London. McDowell won the Academy's Gold Medal in his first term and later was awarded a scholarship. A low-paying stint with a provincial repertory company followed.

When he returned to London, McDowell was accepted by the Royal Shakespeare Company. However, McDowell, not unlike Caligula, is a man given to acting on impulse. In an act of passion, he stormed into the office of director Peter Hall, accusing him of "theatrical nepotism."

“An entire year as an actor and I never spoke a line,” he shouted. “I’m going into films!” McDowell says, “I walked out feeling fantastic and... I was out of work for six months!”

In 1967, after appearances in numerous television shows, he began to gain recognition. His first film, *If...* (1968), won him international acclaim. “An actor’s first requirement is dedication,” he says. “Then he must gradually acquire technique. When I played my first film role – Mike Travis in *If...* – I had no film technique and played the part by instinct. Acting becomes more intense as you acquire more experience. Actors like Cagney, Bogart and Tracey always make their film work look easy: that is their secret.”

McDowell’s second film was *Figures in a Landscape* (1970). In *Long Ago Tomorrow* (1971), he was an athlete turned by an accident into a wheelchair-bound paraplegic. In *A Clockwork Orange*, his most well-known film, he was a hoodlum given to ultra-violence, rape and Beethoven. In *O Lucky Man!*, he was a cheerful innocent out to succeed by any means; in *Royal Flash* (1975), a hypocritical bully; in *Aces High* (1976), a very proper World War I RAF pilot; and in *Voyage of the Damned* (1976), the half-Jewish steward on a Nazi ship during World War II.

Other notable roles for McDowell include *The Passage* (1979), *Time after Time* (1979), *Look Back in Anger* (1980), *Cat People* (1982), *Britannia Hospital* (1982), *Blue Thunder* (1983), *Cross Creek* (1983), *Get Crazy* (1983), *Sunset* (1988), *Moon 44* (1990), *Gangster No. 1* (2000), *I Spy* (2002), *I’ll Sleep when I’m Dead* (2003), Rob Zombie’s *Halloween* (2007), and recurring roles on HBO’s *Entourage* and NBC’s *Heroes*.